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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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S E C R E T DACCA 6283

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, BG, IN
SUBJECT: BDG VIEWS ON RECENT FARAKKA NEGOTIATIONS

REF: DACCA 6257

SUMMARY: THE BDG IS MILDLY ENCOURAGED BY THE RECENT GOI-BDG TALKS ON FARAKKA. IT WILL DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO HOLD DOWN LOCAL EMOTIONALISM ON THE ISSUE TO ENHANCE THE PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS IN REACHING A SHORT TERM SOLUTION DURING THE NEXT ROUND WHICH THE GOI PROPOSES START IN DACCA ON DECMMBER 27. END SUMMARY.

1. FOREIGN SECRETARY TABARAK HUSAIN BRIEFED ME THIS MORNING (DECEMBER 13) ON THE RECENT DACCA NEGOTIATIONS ON THE FARAKKA DISPUTE. TABAREK SAID THE BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS HAD BEEN UNEMOTIONAL AND BUSINESSLIKE. THERE WAS HARD-HEADED BARGAINING, BUT NO ACRIMONY. THE BDG WAS ENCOURAGED BY THE HIGH LEVEL OF THE GOI DELEGATION. JAGJIVAN RAM, HE SAID, IS THE LONGEST-STANDING INDIAN CABINET MINISTER AND HE HAD THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE CERTAIN DECISIONS ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE. HE UNDERSTOOD THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE PROBLEM AND THE DIFFICULTIES IT WAS CREATING FOR BANGLADESH, EVEN THOUGH HE GAVE VERY LITTLE IN THE FINAL
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ANALYSIS.

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2. TABARAK SAID THE BDG WAS PLEASED ALSO THAT JAGJIVAN RAM AGREED TO RESUME THE NEGOTIATIONS IN DACCA IN ORDER THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN APPEARANCE OF CONTINUITY. TABARAK SAID THE BDG HAD JUST RECEIVED THAT MORNING A PROPOSAL FROM NEW DELHI TO RESUME TALKS IN DACCA ON DECEMBER 27. THE BDG WOULD HAVE TO STUDY THIS CAREFULLY SINCE THERE WERE POSSIBLE PROBLEMS INVOLVING VISITS AND VISITORS, BUT HE WAS CONFIDENT THE NEGOTIATIONS WOULD RESUME SOMEWHERE AROUND THAT TIME.

3. REGARDING THE POINTS AT ISSUE, TABARAK SAID THAT BDG WANTED TO RETURN TO THE FORMULA IN THE 1975 INTERIM AGREEMENT (THAT INDIA WOULD WITHDRAW NO MORE THAN 11,000 CUSECS DURING THE LEAN PERIOD AND A MAXIMUM OF 16,000 CUSECS AT OTHER TIMES). SINCE FLOW DURING THE WORST OF THE DRY SEASON IS ABOUT 55,000 CUSECS, THIS WOULD MEAN THAT BANGLADESH WOULD EXPECT TO RECEIVE AT LEAST 44,000 DURING THE DIFFICULT PERIOD FROM MID-APRIL UNTIL MID-MAY. TABARAK SAID, ON A VERY CONFIDENTIAL BASIS, THAT THE BDG HAD ACTUALLY INDICATED ITS WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT 40,000 CUSECS EVEN THOUGH THE BDG WAS CONVINCED THAT ANYTHING BELOW 44,000 WOULD LEAD TO INCREASED SALINITY AND CREATE PROBLEMS IN UTILIZING EXISTING IRRIGATION FACILITIES. DACCA HAD ALSO PROPOSED THAT THE AMOUNT OF WATER AVAILABLE TO BOTH PARTIES BE INCREASED TO OTHER TIMES OF THE YEAR AT TEN-DAY INTERVALS AS THE FLOW OF WATER INCREASED.

4. THE GOI, TABARAK SAID, PROPOSED A FIFTY-FIFTY SPLIT AT FARAKKA, AN IMPROVEMENT HE SAID OVER NEW DELHI'S EARLIER INSISTENCE THAT THE DIVISION BE SET AT HARDINGE BRIDGE. THIS GOI PROPOSAL WOULD MEAN THAT EACH PARTY RECEIVED 27,500 CUSECS AT THE LOW POINT. THE GOI FINALLY CAME UP TO 30,000 CUSECS BUT MADE NO FIRM OFFER BEYOND THAT. (COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND FROM OTHER SOURCES THAT THE GOI MIGHT

BE WILLING TO GO TO 35,000 CUSECS.) INDIA ALSO MADE A MAJOR POINT OF REGENERATION BELOW FARAKKA, ARGUING THAT AS MUCH AS 7,000 CUSECS WOULD FLOW INTO THE RIVER BELOW THE BARRAGE. BANGLADESH DISPUTES THIS FIGURE.

5. TABARAK SAID NEGOTIATING SESSIONS WERE KEPT SMALL, LIMITED PRIMARILY TO PEOPLE AT THE POLICY-

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MAKING LEVEL. THE TECHNICIANS ON BOTH SIDES, WHO
TEND TO GET EMOTIONAL ABOUT DETAILS, WERE EXCLUDED
AND A MAJOR EFFORT WAS MADE TO REACH BROAD AGREEMENT
AT THE POLICY LEVEL WITH THE DETAILS TO BE WORKED
OUT LATER. IF AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED ON THE
CRUCIAL MATTER OF FLOW DURING THE DRY SEASON, THEN
BANGLADESH WOULD BE PERFECTLY WILLING TO PARTICIPATE
IN A LONGER-TERM STUDY OF USE OF WATER RESOURCES
IN THE ENTIRE GANGES BASIN.

6. TO IMPROVE THE CHANCES FOR AGREEMENT, TABARAK
SAID THE BDG WAS MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THE LID
ON LOCAL PUBLIC OPINION. HE FELT THEY HAD LARGELY
SUCCEEDED, AND THERE WERE ONLY ONE OR TWO EDITORIALS
OR PRESS ARTICLES WHICH WERE EMOTIONAL ON THE ISSUE.
AT THE SAME TIME, TABARAK STRESSED THAT WHILE
BANGLADESH IS TRYING TO RESTRAIN PUBLIC OPINION IN
ORDER TO ENHANCE PROSPECTS FOR A SETTLEMENT, THIS
SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN TO MEAN THAT BANGLADESH IS
RELAXED ABOUT THE BASIC PROBLEM. OBTAINING ADEQUATE
WATER IS, HE SAID, A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH. TABARAK
ADDED THAT HE HAD SIGNALED TO THE INDIAN DELEGAIION
THAT BANGLADESH WOULD HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT
TO PURSUE THE MATTER IN OTHER INTERNATIONAL
FORUMS IF THERE WAS NO BILATERAL AGREEMENT. HE
MENTIONED SPECIFICALLY THE MEETING OF THE BUREAU
OF THE NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE IN NEW DELHI IN
MARCH, THE COMMONWEALTH PRIME MINISTERS MEETING
IN MAY, AND THE UNGA SESSION NEXT SEPTEMBER.

7. ON THE RECENT FARAKKA DISCUSSIONS IN THE
UN SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, TABARAK SAID THAT FIVE
NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES HAD BEEN PARTICULARLY HELPFUL
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(EGYPT, SRI LANKA, SYRIA, GUYANA AND NIGERIA).
TURKEY, ALTHOUGH NOT A MEMBER OF THE NAC, WAS
HELPFUL BEHIND THE SCENES AND IN THE ISLAMIC GROUP,
AS WAS PAKISTAN. BANGLADESH WAS CONVINCED THAT
ITS MODIFIED RESOLUTION ON FARAKKA WOULD PASS
IN THE SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, BUT FELT ALSO
THAT THE NUMBER OF ABSTENTIONS WOULD REDUCE ITS
EFFECTIVENESS. THEY THEREFORE YIELDED TO PRESSURE
FROM THE NON-ALIGNED GROUP TO AGREE TO THE
CONSENSUS STATEMENT. I TOLD TABARAK THAT THIS SEEMED
A WISE MOVE. BANGLADESH HAD SUCCEEDED IN FOCUSING
INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION ON THE ISSUE AND HAD PROBABLY
STRENGTHENED ITS HAND FOR THE RECENT BILATERAL
NEGOTIATIONS WHICH STILL OFFERED THE BEST HOPE
FOR SOLUTION.

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